

The Flame

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Summary: Post 3x07 Clarke is heartbroken and furious. She leaves Polis with the Infinity Key/Lexa and goes in search of Luna. She picks up some companions along the way. Clarke quotes William Blake. The title sounds like a Bangles song. Or super gay.

The Flame

The white horse picks its way through the fog that curls through the quiet forests low on the ground, obscuring the vast carpet of ferns and moss and the high, vaulting tree cover. His rider feels broken and her sadness makes him uneasy. She's exhausted, stunned and he is trained for war so he gathers his own strength and carries his master's heart for her.

Hearing the horn and seeing the red smoke curl against the storm clouds to the east, her hand goes unthinking under her cloak, to her chest and what lies there. The small box, carrying the key to her soul, is as ancient a thing as anything could be in this second world—an Earth of dreams, blood, mutation and war. A hell-realm where the strands of myth and time sleep dormant and strangle themselves after the Fall. There are stories and there are stories. The way this one went is no different than any other creation myth that has ever been told.

She caresses the object absently; unaware she does so with the same air of high grace that Lexa revealed to her slowly, over time. Clarke is less vaulted and more recognizably fractured. She feels incalculable and remote to herself; a reluctant, mostly irritated leader who wants to do what every reigning figure has always wanted to do. She wants to disappear from the swirls and eddies of this world—she wants peace. If she was like that queen in the old tale she would retreat from the world as soon as her Lord, the Summer King, had died and she would wait for his promised return; the King in the Light.

Who wants to be alive like that? She's a healer born into a later time after nothing can ever be healed again. She fights against sadness and a singular loss she can't fathom. Clarke spoke Lexa's name with love, too late. Even if she'd thought the words, they were too close, too soon. Lexa was someone she would follow, even after the shadow enveloped them and brought them into the valley of death where she can only accompany her so far.

How can this _thing, _as beautiful and simple as an infinity symbol_, _hold all of her love? It's patently, fucking absurd.

This is as close to a nervous breakdown as she wants to be, and in older cultures, older than the root civilization she comes from, it signals the birth of a healerâ€"if she believes this, she's certifiable. This is another culture's set of beliefs and she's fallen head over ass into it and right now she desperately needs her mother, which pisses her off even more.

Abby, or even Raven, would explain it to her in terms she understands. No bastardized language used. In the medical language Abby speaks and she speaks it like High English and understands what the neuroscience behind itâ€"mental disorders are emergencies, crises, and need to be regarded as such to aid the healer in being born within the person afflicted. Rocket fuel goes boom. With this chip I thee wed, she snorts to the surrounding landscape and the horse beneath her wickers in response. "It's ridiculous, okay?" She says to the animal. He agrees. She wishes Roan was here so she could punch him in the face, the last thing he said to her as she fled was thisâ€"Lexa's death, Clarke's insane grief and compartmentalizationâ€" can be "good news from the other world." Whatever that means.

It was an article, a small one, hidden in the vast stores of medical files her mom gave her one day to find a particular research paper for her. She'd got lost and fell down a rabbit hole. She went from basic run-of-the-mill neuroscience and executive functions to artificial intelligence to crazytown (99% of the old model of the internet) in about an hour.

The article said that a person going through the crisis is chosen as a medium for a message to the community that needs to be communicated from the spirit realm. This key she holds in her handâ€"this infinity field that holds everything she thinks of as Lexa (and her mind rebels so strongly at this she almost throws up)â€"signals the fact that two obviously incompatible energies have merged into the same field, and needless to say, Clarke's suddenly in her own lunatic company of one.

She's an artist. She needs to see this as something that she can alchemize or what's the point. There are the facts and then there are the generalist's views of poetic form and metaphor. And no one here on the ground thinks of this as metaphor, not even Lexa did.

Roan had explained it to her like this; he used mountains as an example to explain the phenomenon. _i_t's a spirit of the mountain he said that is walking side by side with the person and, as a result, creating a time-space distortion that is affecting the person caught in it. The person and the mountain become one. So this freaky-ass infinity key holds Lexa's flame and they're one, or whatever. Goddamit, she has a headache.

Before the Fall, most of the fading, irradiated fabric of this country was made up of the energy of the Machine, and the result was a disconnection and the severing of the past, or total destruction. The ancestral spirit of this unbelievably ancientâ€"four and a half billion year oldâ€"planet, this deeply rooted natural world comes visiting and declares itself stronger than any species that might arrogantly think they're immortal. Simple Systems Theory. Gaia Theory.

It's not so much what the Code wanted for Lexa as it is what Lexa wanted for the Code. The Program, the second iteration of the A.L.I.E data, saw in Lexa a will to make life meaningful, and so it responded to that. Why would a code seek peace? Why would it want to learn and feel love? Why would it desire to do this? Why would it exhibit a strong enough longing for connection that it would merge and entwine itself into a questionably cosmic and decidedly human dimension of love?

Most of this longing remains unconscious in a human being; it flickers around the edges. It was in Lexa and it's in Clarke, but for the programâ€"conscious or unconscious doesn't make any difference. Lexa and the program, together as one entity, responded to either.

Suddenly Roan is right next to her, walking beside the horse, taking its lead. Clarke doesn't even startle at his appearance. She's known he's followed her since he led her out. She didn't care then and she doesn't care now. "You weren't quiet about it," she says.

"Wasn't trying to be," he shrugs. "You need help, Clarke. I can go back at anytime. Ontari can dig her own grave for now; she doesn't know the lineage. That will cause problems."

Clarke doesn't answer or understand, she barely cares and drops the reins, gathers her cloak around her.

"I loved her, too." He says, not looking at her.

The boy who steps out from the mottled shadows does make Clarke gasp. "And I loved her." Aden says quietly, gravely.

He looks like he's aged a decade since she last saw him. His impossible appearance jolts Clarke into action. She jumps down and rushes him, takes him into her arms and holds him to her desperately. He clings to her and strokes her hair, wipes her tears as she wipes his. When she pulls back she slides her hands over his face, looks into his eyes, "I saw you. I saw you dead. You and the other Natblida. I don'tâ€" howâ€" "

"My brother had come to wish me good luck in the Conclave. He was there when she came. He knocked me unconscious and pushed me out of the way, hidden."

"Your brotherâ€" Clarke stumbles, desperate not to hear what she's hearing. "Your brother sacrificed himself. Your twin?"

Aden shakes his head, "Not a twin. Just the same hair, the same buildâ€" He's overcome and trying to hide it and Clarke looks up at Roan, who stares at both of them with unfathomable pity. Natblidas

are taken away from their families, sequestered. It must have been years since they'd seen each other. The Commander became their family.

"I didn't know," Roan says. "I'm sorry. I didn't know."

Clarke straightens but doesn't let go of Aden's hand. She takes the Infinity Key and hands to him, "Then this is yours."

Aden shakes his head and steps back, "No."

Clarke stares at him, "What do you mean, no."

"I will not do this."

"You have to Aden, you promised Lexa."

Aden looks at Roan for help. Roan examines his face carefully, for a long time, and then turns to Clarke, "He doesn't know why and couldn't explain it to you, but he's right. The Flameâ€" "

"What are you two _even talking about?_ Do you want Ontari to be the next Commander?"

"Of course not," Roan growls, "God, of course not, no. But Aden is telling you otherwiseâ€"he's of the blood. So listen."

"Let's keep moving," Aden's head comes up, as if scenting something. "There's someone else out here. Let's keep moving."

* * *

><p>They build a fire, hidden from view in a cave, and huddle together. From somewhere deep in the Earth, Clarke can hear water flowing.</p>

What Aden is saying is the exact same nonsense Roan had said. Merge the mountain, or in this caseâ€"the Flame, and human energy. Pick up a stone that calls to you. Bring that stone back and then keep it as a companion; carry it around with you. The presence, the living resonance of the stone attunes the perceptive ability of its companion, and they receive information. They can make use of that information. They get tangible guidance from inside the Flame, from the line of Commandersâ€"how to live their life. How to save their life.

"This is what Heda always told us. Nothing extraordinary has to be done in an extraordinary situation," Aden says. "She said, sometimes it is as simple as carrying a stone."

"Lost in ley lines and Latin." Clarke murmurs.

"What?" Aden asks. Clarke shakes her head.

"Then why did you all kill each other? That's the stupidest succession plan I've ever heard of."

Roan rolls his eyes and throws a stick at her from where he sits. She catches it and he grunts.

* * *

><p>Deep in the night, the embers banked low, Clarke wakes. Aden is curled gently against her and doesn't wake when she moves to sit up. Roan lies asleep, just as deeply, and neither of them stir as Clarke takes up a piece of wood from the fire pit and uses it to light her way. She walks as best she can, her hand held out to the damp walls for balance back into the darkness, towards the sound of an underground stream. She does it without thinkingâ€"it's the only thing she can do. The Infinity Key rests again against her heart, has never left.</p>

It feels like she walks for hours, picking her way slowly through the narrow passageway. She crawls at times and doesn't question anything. She's tired of questions. She's tired of herself. She's tired of love and hurt, and god does she hurt. The scrapes and bruises, the blood she feels dripping down her arms from the tearing against rock and ice; she doesn't care.

The cavern she comes to is illuminated by nothing, and everything. The waters she stands next to are as deep, and just as still as Lexa was right before coming for her the first time. It was a miracle between them. Nothing in the lambent depths resembles any sense of Time she understands or will ever understand. The luminescence pervading the vast space comes from the water itself. It comes from the Air and the Earth. And she puts down her makeshift torch; and she realizes she has all the four elements with her: Earth, Air, Water, Fire (or the Flame). If she could cry anymore than she has she would, but she has nothing left. She is nothing. She takes off her boots and wades into the cold expanse. And she waits.

She waits for a long time. She clutches the Infinity key to her breast. She waits and she speaks, or rather, the Key speaks an old poem, "What is the price of experience? Is it bought for a song or wisdom for a dance in the street? No, it is bought with all that a man hath. His wife, his home, his children."

The only thing that answers her is her own voice echoing into eternity. And she waits some more.

"You're very good at making things impossible for me, Clarke. That's the second time I've had to send Roan after you."

Clarke turns fully, without a word, and after a furious, endless moment, Lexa drops her gaze.

All of it, the whole last 48 hours fuels Clarke's temper, and she doesn't know what to do. Yes she does, actually, she wants to kill Lexa all over again.

"I saw you die. I sawâ€! that _thing_ taken out of your neck. Whatever you are, a dream, a need, a ghostâ€"get away from me. This is sick."

"A ghost of Christmas Past?" Lexa tilts her head and smiles, "I can't die, not that way. My blood won't allow it. It's regenerative."

That sends Clarke into an active fury, because she's so beyond shock she just might start laughing hysterically and she's completely ferociously angry, so that won't happen before she destroys whatever

this is standing in front of her. "Regenerative. _Regenerative?" _She stalks over through the water to where Lexa stands and holds up the Key. "You bled out in front of me. Titus _cut_ this out of you. I held you as you went cold. Youâ€"Jesus, Lexaâ€"you didn't respond, okay? You _died_. You made me think you died?"

"Aren't you happy to see me?" Lexa asks and the question is so guileless, so innocent, so surprised at Clarke's reaction that Clarke can only blink stupidly at her.

Lexa eliminates the small space left between them and gentle hands cup and caress Clarke's face, pulling her in for a slow kiss that effectively causes Clarke to stop breathing, because Lexa's hands are warm, alive. This is not a ghost or a projection or anything else that might be possible in this fucked up post-world. No one kisses her like this, no one but Lexa

Lexa's lips meet hers before Clarke can break away or react, and then Clarke can't do anything, she can't function.

Her mind, what little there is left, goes white and her legs almost collapse under her. She responds with everything in her. Every instinct she has fires and reciprocates as she kisses Lexa back. She closes her eyes as Lexa's tongue brushes against her bottom lip. One of them moans, and her hands grasp at the soft wool of Lexa's cloak to keep her from falling. Lexa's mouth and tongue are soft, welcoming like silk, demanding, and Clarke drowns.

As Lexa brings their bodies flush against each other's, Clarke feels herself relax into her arms, and any desire to force this away is gone with one touch. She's aware of the water surrounding them, she knows that Lexa has waded in with her and holds her fiercely as the light in the molecular structure of the lake begins to change; it's reflecting the green of Lexa's eyes. Somewhere in the far reaches of her mind, Clarke realizes the emerald, vibrant eyes that she's seen in her dreamsâ€"for her entire lifeâ€"now surround her completely.

Wherever else they have to talk about, whatever else exists between them doesn't matter right now. It will matter and it will always matter and Lexa has a fuck of a lot of explaining to do but all she can handle, and that just barely, is Lexa's body against hers telegraphing a longing so deep Clarke can feel it in her own blood like a song.

"And yes, Clarke," Lexa whispers, "This is an I told you so."

Clarke wrenches away and brings their foreheads together, breathes in deeply and starts to sob. Lexa's gaze stays on Clarkeâ€"her eyes wide, naked and compassionate, her strong arms holding her.

Clarke's terrified at her own reaction, by everything. "Don't disappear, don't be in my head, and don't leave me." Clarke sounds so broken and so angry that Lexa thinks she might end up being thrown backwards into the freezing water.

The desire to look at Clarke, though, to really look, eclipses anything else and she pulls back just far enough to continue to do so. Her eyes move over Clarke's face, her hand skims over Clarke's

jaw, brushes against warm lips. "I am so sorry. I'm sorry for all of it. No one could know. Titus and Iâ€" "

Clarke watches Lexa falter, grow unsure. She sees the disbelief and awe as Lexa absorbs Clarke's reaction, before a hand smooths up Clarke's neck and Lexa's fingers trails through her hair to pull Clarke back to her. Bringing their mouths and tongues together again. The slow, firm press pulls a sigh from both of them. Their hands trace overheated skin. The overwhelming sensation of coming home gives them a place outside the chaos of the world.

"All is war." Lexa folds Clarke into her cloak and presses her mouth to her ear, murmurs to her, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. And out of that comes the heat and the light of life and death. We will change that."

"Do you have to talk about war all the time? Your own death?" Clarke barely hides a grin as she calms down.

"Sorry, it's the language we use here, it's in the air," Lexa smiles, "We're human, all of us. We're God's brothers and sisters. I'm still Natblida. The Flame is still in me."

"What's the difference between you and the former Commanders, Heda_?" Roan and Aden step out of the darkness. Clarke turns and catches Aden, rushing headlong into the water, in her arms and hands him to Lexa, who crushes him to her.

Lexa laughs, "Oh, I have no idea. Maybe that we can finally participate, act in and be part of the transformation of the planet. Do you believe me now? I'm here. I never left."

She takes the Infinity Key out of Clarke's hands and tosses it to Aden. "It's your turn. You matter. You count."

"And we have to find Luna." Roan nods.

"They used to call this the Philosophers Stone," Lexa reaches for Clarke's hand, "We're beyond the end of time. If you're hungry, you eat it. If you're dirty, you wash with it. If you need to go somewhere, it will take you. If you have a question, it answers it. It's something that we sense in ourselves. It's not a myth or a fairy tale. We made it, it's us. All the pain, all the love. Everything."

"You all knew about this?" Clarke begins to get angry again. "Indra is fucking dying of griefâ€"

Roan and Aden, eyes panicked, shake their heads wildly and point to Lexa.

Lexa kisses the back of her hand, "It's in the second iteration of the codeâ€"it should have been there all along since it's essentially humanâ€"a primary reality behind appearances. My death needed to be real. Everything is in motion."

"The second iteration of the Code wouldn't have broken my goddamn heart," Clarke pushes Lexa and Aden into the water and lunges towards Roan, who steps lightly out of the way. Clarke pulls herself up in utter frustration, "GOD. WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?"

"FUCK," Clarke roars at everyone, "Roan and I don't have the black blood, what do we do?"

Lexa and Aden bob up from the water, grinning. Lexa smiles, "We talk to Abby. And we help Raven. Or Raven helps us."

"THIS ISN'T FUNNY. I AM GOING TO FUCK YOU UP LATER." Clarke yells at Lexa, she's beside herself.

Roan sends her a delighted grin.

"No, you can't watch, Jackass."

End
file.